

ADAMS ANDY

THE OUTLET

Andy Adams
The Outlet

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36365326

The Outlet:

Содержание

PREFACE	4
CHAPTER I. OPENING THE CAMPAIGN	8
CHAPTER II. ORGANIZING THE FORCES	19
CHAPTER III. RECEIVING AT LOS LOBOS	36
CHAPTER IV. MINGLING WITH THE EXODUS	53
CHAPTER V. RED RIVER STATION	69
CHAPTER VI. CAMP SUPPLY	81
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	87

Andy Adams

The Outlet

PREFACE

At the close of the civil war the need for a market for the surplus cattle of Texas was as urgent as it was general. There had been numerous experiments in seeking an outlet, and there is authority for the statement that in 1857 Texas cattle were driven to Illinois. Eleven years later forty thousand head were sent to the mouth of Red River in Louisiana, shipped by boat to Cairo, Illinois, and thence inland by rail. Fever resulted, and the experiment was never repeated. To the west of Texas stretched a forbidding desert, while on the other hand, nearly every drive to Louisiana resulted in financial disaster to the drover. The republic of Mexico, on the south, afforded no relief, as it was likewise overrun with a surplus of its own breeding. Immediately before and just after the war, a slight trade had sprung up in cattle between eastern points on Red River and Baxter Springs, in the southeast corner of Kansas. The route was perfectly feasible, being short and entirely within the reservations of the Choctaws and Cherokees, civilized Indians. This was the only route to the north; for farther to the westward was the home of the buffalo and the unconquered, nomadic tribes. A writer on that day, Mr.

Emerson Hough, an acceptable authority, says: "The civil war stopped almost all plans to market the range cattle, and the close of that war found the vast grazing lands of Texas fairly covered with millions of cattle which had no actual or determinate value. They were sorted and branded and herded after a fashion, but neither they nor their increase could be converted into anything but more cattle. The demand for a market became imperative."

This was the situation at the close of the '50's and meanwhile there had been no cessation in trying to find an outlet for the constantly increasing herds. Civilization was sweeping westward by leaps and bounds, and during the latter part of the '60's and early '70's, a market for a very small percentage of the surplus was established at Abilene, Ellsworth, and Wichita, being confined almost exclusively to the state of Kansas. But this outlet, slight as it was, developed the fact that the transplanted Texas steer, after a winter in the north, took on flesh like a native, and by being double-wintered became a marketable beef. It should be understood in this connection that Texas, owing to climatic conditions, did not mature an animal into marketable form, ready for the butcher's block. Yet it was an exceptional country for breeding, the percentage of increase in good years reaching the phenomenal figures of ninety-five calves to the hundred cows. At this time all eyes were turned to the new Northwest, which was then looked upon as the country that would at last afford the proper market. Railroads were pushing into the domain of the buffalo and Indian; the rush of emigration was westward, and the

Texan was clamoring for an outlet for his cattle. It was written in the stars that the Indian and buffalo would have to stand aside.

Philanthropists may deplore the destruction of the American bison, yet it was inevitable. Possibly it is not commonly known that the general government had under consideration the sending of its own troops to destroy the buffalo. Yet it is a fact, for the army in the West fully realized the futility of subjugating the Indians while they could draw subsistence from the bison. The well-mounted aborigines hung on the flanks of the great buffalo herds, migrating with them, spurning all treaty obligations, and when opportunity offered murdering the advance guard of civilization with the fiendish atrocity of carnivorous animals. But while the government hesitated, the hide-hunters and the railroads solved the problem, and the Indian's base of supplies was destroyed.

Then began the great exodus of Texas cattle. The red men were easily confined on reservations, and the vacated country in the Northwest became cattle ranges. The government was in the market for large quantities of beef with which to feed its army and Indian wards. The maximum year's drive was reached in 1884, when nearly eight hundred thousand cattle, in something over three hundred herds, bound for the new Northwest, crossed Red River, the northern boundary of Texas. Some slight idea of this exodus can be gained when one considers that in the above year about four thousand men and over thirty thousand horses were required on the trail, while the value of the drive

ran into millions. The history of the world can show no pastoral movement in comparison. The Northwest had furnished the market—the outlet for Texas.

CHAPTER I. OPENING THE CAMPAIGN

"Well, gentlemen, if that is the best rate you can offer us, then we'll drive the cattle. My boys have all been over the trail before, and your figures are no inducement to ship as far as Red River. We are fully aware of the nature of the country, but we can deliver the herds at their destination for less than you ask us for shipping them one third of the distance. No; we'll drive all the way."

The speaker was Don Lovell, a trail drover, and the parties addressed were the general freight agents of three railroad lines operating in Texas. A conference had been agreed upon, and we had come in by train from the ranch in Medina County to attend the meeting in San Antonio. The railroad representatives were shrewd, affable gentlemen, and presented an array of facts hard to overcome. They were well aware of the obstacles to be encountered in the arid, western portion of the state, and magnified every possibility into a stern reality. Unrolling a large state map upon the table, around which the principals were sitting, the agent of the Denver and Fort Worth traced the trail from Buffalo Gap to Doan's Crossing on Red River. Producing what was declared to be a report of the immigration agent of his line, he showed by statistics that whole counties through which

the old trail ran had recently been settled up by Scandinavian immigrants. The representative of the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas, when opportunity offered, enumerated every disaster which had happened to any herd to the westward of his line in the past five years. The factor of the International was equally well posted.

"Now, Mr. Lovell," said he, dumping a bundle of papers on the table, "if you will kindly glance over these documents, I think I can convince you that it is only a question of a few years until all trail cattle will ship the greater portion of the way. Here is a tabulated statement up to and including the year '83. From twenty counties tributary to our line and south of this city, you will notice that in '80 we practically handled no cattle intended for the trail. Passing on to the next season's drive, you see we secured a little over ten per cent. of the cattle and nearly thirty per cent. of the horse stock. Last year, or for '83, drovers took advantage of our low rates for Red River points, and the percentage ran up to twenty-four and a fraction, or practically speaking, one fourth of the total drive. We are able to offer the same low rates this year, and all arrangements are completed with our connecting lines to give live-stock trains carrying trail cattle a passenger schedule. Now, if you care to look over this correspondence, you will notice that we have inquiries which will tax our carrying capacity to its utmost. The 'Laurel Leaf' and 'Running W' people alone have asked for a rate on thirty thousand head."

But the drover brushed the correspondence aside, and asked

for the possible feed bills. A blanket rate had been given on the entire shipment from that city, or any point south, to Wichita Falls, with one rest and feed. Making a memorandum of the items, Lovell arose from the table and came over to where Jim Flood and I were searching for Fort Buford on a large wall map. We were both laboring under the impression that it was in Montana, but after our employer pointed it out to us at the mouth of the Yellowstone in Dakota, all three of us adjourned to an ante-room. Flood was the best posted trail foreman in Don Lovell's employ, and taking seats at the table, we soon reduced the proposed shipping expense to a pro-rata sum per head. The result was not to be considered, and on returning to the main office, our employer, as already expressed, declined the proffered rate.

Then the freight men doubled on him, asking if he had taken into consideration a saving in wages. In a two days' run they would lay down the cattle farther on their way than we could possibly drive in six weeks, even if the country was open, not to say anything about the wear and tear of horseflesh. But Don Lovell had not been a trail drover for nearly fifteen years without understanding his business as well as the freight agents did theirs. After going over a large lot of other important data, our employer arose to take his leave, when the agent of the local line expressed a hope that Mr. Lovell would reconsider his decision before spring opened, and send his drive a portion of the way by rail.

"Well, I'm glad I met you, gentlemen," said the cowman at

parting, "but this is purely a business proposition, and you and I look at it from different viewpoints. At the rate you offer, it will cost me one dollar and seventy-five cents to lay a steer down on Red River. Hold on; mine are all large beeves; and I must mount my men just the same as if they trailed all the way. Saddle-horses were worth nothing in the North last year, and I kept mine and bought enough others around Dodge to make up a thousand head, and sent them back over the trail to my ranch. Now, it will take six carloads of horses for each herd, and I propose to charge the freight on them against the cattle. I may have to winter my remudas in the North, or drive them home again, and if I put two dollars a head freight in them, they won't bring a cent more on that account. With the cattle it's different; they are all under contract, but the horses must be charged as general expense, and if nothing is realized out of them, the herd must pay the fiddler. My largest delivery is a sub-contract for Fort Buford, calling for five million pounds of beef on foot. It will take three herds or ten thousand cattle to fill it. I was anxious to give those Buford beeves an early start, and that was the main reason in my consenting to this conference. I have three other earlier deliveries at Indian agencies, but they are not as far north by several hundred miles, and it's immaterial whether we ship or not. But the Buford contract sets the day of delivery for September 15, and it's going to take close figuring to make a cent. The main contractors are all right, but I'm the one that's got to scratch his head and figure close and see that there's no

leakages. Your freight bill alone would be a nice profit. It may cost us a little for water getting out of Texas, but with the present outlet for cattle, it's bad policy to harass the herds. Water is about the best crop some of those settlers along the trail have to sell, and they ought to treat us right."

After the conference was over, we scattered about the city, on various errands, expecting to take the night train home. It was then the middle of February, and five of the six herds were already purchased. In spite of the large numbers of cattle which the trail had absorbed in previous years, there was still an abundance of all ages, anxious for a market. The demand in the North had constantly been for young cattle, leaving the matured steers at home. Had Mr. Lovell's contracts that year called for forty thousand five and six year old beeves, instead of twenty, there would have been the same inexhaustible supply from which to pick and choose. But with only one herd yet to secure, and ample offerings on every hand, there was no necessity for a hurry. Many of the herds driven the year before found no sale, and were compelled to winter in the North at the drover's risk. In the early spring of '84, there was a decided lull over the enthusiasm of the two previous years, during the former of which the trail afforded an outlet for nearly seven hundred thousand Texas cattle.

In regard to horses we were well outfitted. During the summer of '83, Don Lovell had driven four herds, two on Indian contract and two of younger cattle on speculation. Of the latter, one was sold in Dodge for delivery on the Purgatory River in southern

Colorado, while the other went to Ogalalla, and was disposed of and received at that point. In both cases there was no chance to sell the saddle horses, and they returned to Dodge and were sent to pasture down the river in the settlements. My brother, Bob Quirk, had driven one of the other herds to an agency in the Indian Territory. After making the delivery, early in August, on his employer's orders, he had brought his remuda and outfit into Dodge, the horses being also sent to pasture and the men home to Texas. I had made the trip that year to the Pine Ridge Agency in Dakota with thirty-five hundred beeves, under Flood as foreman. Don Lovell was present at the delivery, and as there was no hope of effecting a sale of the saddle stock among the Indians, after delivering the outfit at the nearest railroad, I was given two men and the cook, and started back over the trail for Dodge with the remuda. The wagon was a drawback, but on reaching Ogalalla, an emigrant outfit offered me a fair price for the mules and commissary, and I sold them. Lashing our rations and blankets on two pack-horses, we turned our backs on the Platte and crossed the Arkansaw at Dodge on the seventh day.

But instead of the remainder of the trip home by rail, as we fondly expected, the programme had changed. Lovell and Flood had arrived in Dodge some ten days before, and looking over the situation, had come to the conclusion it was useless even to offer our remudas. As remnants of that year's drive, there had concentrated in and around that market something like ten thousand saddle horses. Many of these were from central and

north Texas, larger and better stock than ours, even though care had been used in selecting the latter. So on their arrival, instead of making any effort to dispose of our own, the drover and his foreman had sized up the congested condition of the market, and turned buyers. They had bought two whole remudas, and picked over five or six others until their purchases amounted to over five hundred head. Consequently on our reaching Dodge with the Pine Ridge horses, I was informed that they were going to send all the saddle stock back over the trail to the ranch and that I was to have charge of the herd. Had the trip been in the spring and the other way, I certainly would have felt elated over my promotion. Our beef herd that year had been put up in Dimmit County, and from there to the Pine Ridge Agency and back to the ranch would certainly be a summer's work to gratify an ordinary ambition.

In the mean time and before our arrival, Flood had brought up all the stock and wagons from the settlement, and established a camp on Mulberry Creek, south of Dodge on the trail. He had picked up two Texans who were anxious to see their homes once more, and the next day at noon we started. The herd numbered a thousand and sixty head, twenty of which were work-mules. The commissary which was to accompany us was laden principally with harness; and waving Flood farewell, we turned homeward, leaving behind unsold of that year's drive only two wagons. Lovell had instructed us never to ride the same horse twice, and wherever good grass and water were encountered, to kill as much time as possible. My employer was enthusiastic over the idea,

and well he might be, for a finer lot of saddle horses were not in the possession of any trail drover, while those purchased in Dodge could have been resold in San Antonio at a nice profit. Many of the horses had run idle several months and were in fine condition. With the allowance of four men and a cook, a draft-book for personal expenses, and over a thousand horses from which to choose a mount, I felt like an embryo foreman, even if it was a back track and the drag end of the season. Turning everything scot free at night, we reached the ranch in old Medina in six weeks, actually traveling about forty days.

But now, with the opening of the trail season almost at hand, the trials of past years were forgotten in the enthusiasm of the present. I had a distinct recollection of numerous resolves made on rainy nights, while holding a drifting herd, that this was positively my last trip over the trail. Now, however, after a winter of idleness, my worst fear was that I might be left at home with the ranch work, and thus miss the season's outing entirely. There were new charms in the Buford contract which thrilled me,—its numerical requirements, the sight of the Yellowstone again, and more, to be present at the largest delivery of the year to the government. Rather than have missed the trip, I would have gladly cooked or wrangled the horses for one of the outfits.

On separating, Lovell urged his foreman and myself to be at the depot in good time to catch our train. That our employer's contracts for the year would require financial assistance, both of us were fully aware. The credit of Don Lovell was gilt edge,

not that he was a wealthy cowman, but the banks and moneyed men of the city recognized his business ability. Nearly every year since he began driving cattle, assistance had been extended him, but the promptness with which he had always met his obligations made his patronage desirable.

Flood and I had a number of errands to look after for the boys on the ranch and ourselves, and, like countrymen, reached the depot fully an hour before the train was due. Not possessed of enough gumption to inquire if the westbound was on time, we loitered around until some other passengers informed us that it was late. Just as we were on the point of starting back to town, Lovell drove up in a hack, and the three of us paced the platform until the arrival of the belated train.

"Well, boys, everything looks serene," said our employer, when we had walked to the farther end of the depot. "I can get all the money I need, even if we shipped part way, which I don't intend to do. The banks admit that cattle are a slow sale and a shade lower this spring, and are not as free with their money as a year or two ago. My bankers detained me over an hour until they could send for a customer who claimed to have a very fine lot of beeves for sale in Lasalle County. That he is anxious to sell there is no doubt, for he offered them to me on my own time, and agrees to meet any one's prices. I half promised to come back next week and go down with him to Lasalle and look his cattle over. If they show up right, there will be no trouble in buying them, which will complete our purchases. It is my intention, Jim,

to give you the herd to fill our earliest delivery. Our next two occur so near together that you will have to represent me at one of them. The Buford cattle, being the last by a few weeks, we will both go up there and see it over with. There are about half a dozen trail foremen anxious for the two other herds, and while they are good men, I don't know of any good reason for not pushing my own boys forward. I have already decided to give Dave Sponsilier and Quince Forrest two of the Buford herds, and I reckon, Tom, the last one will fall to you."

The darkness in which we were standing shielded my egotism from public view. But I am conscious that I threw out my brisket several inches and stood straight on my bow-legs as I thanked old man Don for the foremanship of his sixth herd. Flood was amused, and told me afterward that my language was extravagant. There is an old superstition that if a man ever drinks out of the Rio Grande, it matters not where he roams afterward, he is certain to come back to her banks again. I had watered my horse in the Yellowstone in '82, and ever afterward felt an itching to see her again. And here the opportunity opened before me, not as a common cow-hand, but as a trail boss and one of three in filling a five million pound government beef contract! But it was dark and I was afoot, and if I was a trifle "chesty," there had suddenly come new colorings to my narrow world.

On the arrival of the train, several other westward-bound cowmen boarded it. We all took seats in the smoker, it being but a two hours' run to our destination. Flood and I were sitting well

forward in the car, the former almost as elated over my good fortune as myself. "Well, won't old Quince be all puffed up," said Jim to me, "when the old man tells him he's to have a herd. Now, I've never said a word in favor of either one of you. Of course, when Mr. Lovell asked me if I knew certain trail foremen who were liable to be idle this year, I intimated that he had plenty of material in his employ to make a few of his own. The old man may be a trifle slow on reaching a decision, but once he makes up his mind, he's there till the cows come home. Now, all you and Quince need to do is to make good, for you couldn't ask for a better man behind you. In making up your outfit, you want to know every man you hire, and give a preference to gray hairs, for they're not so liable to admire their shadow in sunny or get homesick in falling weather. Tom, where you made a ten-strike with the old man was in accepting that horse herd at Dodge last fall. Had you made a whine or whimper then, the chances are you wouldn't be bossing a herd this year. Lovell is a cowman who likes to see a fellow take his medicine with a smile."

CHAPTER II. ORGANIZING THE FORCES

Don Lovell and Jim Flood returned from Lasalle County on the last day of February. They had spent a week along the Upper Nueces, and before returning to the ranch closed a trade on thirty-four hundred five and six year old beeves. According to their report, the cattle along the river had wintered in fine condition, and the grass had already started in the valley. This last purchase concluded the buying for trail purposes, and all absent foremen were notified to be on hand at the ranch on March 10, for the beginning of active operations. Only some ten of us had wintered at headquarters in Medina County, and as about ninety men would be required for the season's work, they would have to be secured elsewhere. All the old foremen expected to use the greater portion of the men who were in their employ the year before, and could summon them on a few days' notice. But Forrest and myself were compelled to hire entirely new outfits, and it was high time we were looking up our help.

One of Flood's regular outfit had married during the winter, and with Forrest's and my promotion, he had only to secure three new men. He had dozens of applications from good cow-hands, and after selecting for himself offered the others to Quince and me. But my brother Bob arrived at the ranch, from our home

in Karnes County, two days later, having also a surplus of men at his command. Although he did not show any enthusiasm over my promotion, he offered to help me get up a good outfit of boys. I had about half a dozen good fellows in view, and on Bob's approval of them, he selected from his overplus six more as first choice and four as second. It would take me a week of constant riding to see all these men, and as Flood and Forrest had made up an outfit for the latter from the former's available list, Quince and I saddled up and rode away to hire outfits. Forrest was well acquainted in Wilson, where Lovell had put up several trail herds, and as it joined my home county, we bore each other company the first day.

A long ride brought us to the Atascosa, where we stayed all night. The next morning we separated, Quince bearing due east for Floresville, while I continued southeast towards my home near Cibollo Ford on the San Antonio River. It had been over a year since I had seen the family, and on reaching the ranch, my father gruffly noticed me, but my mother and sisters received me with open arms. I was a mature man of twenty-eight at the time, mustached, and stood six feet to a plumb-line. The family were cognizant of my checkered past, and although never mentioning it, it seemed as if my misfortunes had elevated me in the estimation of my sisters, while to my mother I had become doubly dear.

During the time spent in that vicinity, I managed to reach home at night as often as possible. Constantly using fresh horses,

I covered a wide circle of country, making one ride down the river into Goliad County of over fifty miles, returning the next day. Within a week I had made up my outfit, including the horse-wrangler and cook. Some of the men were ten years my senior, while only a few were younger, but I knew that these latter had made the trip before and were as reliable as their elders. The wages promised that year were fifty dollars a month, the men to furnish only their own saddles and blankets, and at that figure I picked two pastoral counties, every man bred to the occupation. The trip promised six months' work with return passage, and I urged every one employed to make his appearance at headquarters, in Medina, on or before the 15th of the month. There was no railroad communication through Karnes and Goliad counties at that time, and all the boys were assured that their private horses would have good pasturage at the home ranch while they were away, and I advised them all to come on horseback. By this method they would have a fresh horse awaiting them on their return from the North with which to continue their homeward journey. All the men engaged were unmarried, and taken as a whole, I flattered myself on having secured a crack outfit.

I was in a hurry to get back to the ranch. There had been nothing said about the remudas before leaving, and while we had an abundance of horses, no one knew them better than I did. For that reason I wanted to be present when their allotment was made, for I knew that every foreman would try to get the

best mounts, and I did not propose to stand behind the door and take the culls. Many of the horses had not had a saddle on them in eight months, while all of them had run idle during the winter in a large mesquite pasture and were in fine condition with the opening of spring. So bidding my folks farewell, I saddled at noon and took a cross-country course for the ranch, covering the hundred and odd miles in a day and a half. Reaching headquarters late at night, I found that active preparations had been going on during my absence. There were new wagons to rig, harness to oil, and a carpenter was then at work building chuck-boxes for each of the six commissaries. A wholesale house in the city had shipped out a stock of staple supplies, almost large enough to start a store. There were whole coils of new rope of various sizes, from lariats to corral cables, and a sufficient amount of the largest size to make a stack of hobbles as large as a haycock. Four new branding-irons to the wagon, the regulation "Circle Dot," completed the main essentials.

All the foremen had reported at the ranch, with the exception of Forrest, who came in the next evening with three men. The division of the horses had not even come up for discussion, but several of the boys about headquarters who were friendly to my interests posted me that the older foremen were going to claim first choice. Archie Tolleston, next to Jim Flood in seniority in Lovell's employ, had spent every day riding among the horses, and had even boasted that he expected to claim fifteen of the best for his own saddle. Flood was not so particular, as his destination

was in southern Dakota, but my brother Bob was again ticketed for the Crow Agency in Montana, and would naturally expect a good remuda. Tolleston was going to western Wyoming, while the Fort Buford cattle were a two-weeks' later delivery and fully five hundred miles farther travel. On my return Lovell was in the city, but I felt positive that if he took a hand in the division, Tolleston would only run on the rope once.

A few days before the appointed time, the men began thronging into headquarters. Down to the minutest detail about the wagons and mule teams, everything was shipshape. The commissary department was stocked for a month, and everything was ready to harness in and move. Lovell's headquarters was a stag ranch, and as fast as the engaged cooks reported, they were assigned to wagons, and kept open house in relieving the home cocinero. In the absence of our employer, Flood was virtually at the head of affairs, and artfully postponed the division of horses until the last moment. My outfit had all come in in good time, and we were simply resting on our oars until the return of old man Don from San Antonio. The men were jubilant and light-hearted as a lot of school-boys, and with the exception of a feeling of jealousy among the foremen over the remudas, we were a gay crowd, turning night into day. But on the return of our employer, all frivolity ceased, and the ranch stood at attention. The only unfinished work was the division of the horses, and but a single day remained before the agreed time for starting. Jim Flood had met his employer at the station the night before, and while

returning to the ranch, the two discussed the apportionment of the saddle stock. The next morning all the foremen were called together, when the drover said to his trail bosses:

"Boys, I suppose you are all anxious to get a good remuda for this summer's trip. Well, I've got them for you. The only question is, how can we distribute them equitably so that all interests will be protected. One herd may not have near the distance to travel that the others have. It would look unjust to give it the best horses, and yet it may have the most trouble. Our remudas last year were all picked animals. They had an easy year's work. With the exception of a few head, we have the same mounts and in much better condition than last year. This is about my idea of equalizing things. You four old foremen will use your remudas of last year. Then each of you six bosses select twenty-five head each of the Dodge horses,—turn and turn about. Add those to your old remudas, and cull back your surplus, allowing ten to the man, twelve to the foreman, and five extra to each herd in case of cripples or of galled backs. By this method, each herd will have two dozen prime saddlers, the pick of a thousand picked ones, and fit for any man who was ever in my employ. I'm breaking in two new foremen this year, and they shall have no excuse for not being mounted, and will divide the remainder. Now, take four men apiece and round up the saddle stock, and have everything in shape to go into camp to-night. I'll be present at the division, and I warn you all that I want no clashing."

A ranch remuda was driven in, and we saddled. There were

about thirty thousand acres in the pasture, and by eleven o'clock everything was thrown together. The private horses of all the boys had been turned into a separate inclosure, and before the cutting out commenced, every mother's son, including Don Lovell, arrived at the round-up. There were no corrals on the ranch which would accommodate such a body of animals, and thus the work had to be done in the open; but with the force at hand we threw a cordon around them, equal to a corral, and the cutting out to the four quarters commenced.

The horses were gentle and handled easily. Forrest and I turned to and helped our old foreman cut out his remuda of the year before. There were several horses in my old mount that I would have liked to have again, but I knew it was useless to try and trade Jim out of them, as he knew their qualities and would have robbed me in demanding their equivalent. When the old remudas were again separated, they were counted and carefully looked over by both foremen and men, and were open to the inspection of all who cared to look. Everything was passing very pleasantly, and the cutting of the extra twenty-five began. Then my selfishness was weighed in the balance and found to be full weight. I had ridden over a hundred of the best of them, but when any one appealed to me, even my own dear brother, I was as dumb as an oyster about a horse. Tolleston, especially, cursed, raved, and importuned me to help him get a good private mount, but I was as innocent as I was immovable. The trip home from Dodge was no pleasure jaunt, and now I was

determined to draw extra pay in getting the cream of that horse herd. There were other features governing my actions: Flood was indifferent; Forrest, at times, was cruel to horses, and had I helped my brother, I might have been charged with favoritism. Dave Sponsilier was a good horseman, as his selections proved, and I was not wasting any love and affection on Archie Tolleston that day, anyhow.

That no undue advantage should be taken, Lovell kept tally of every horse cut out, and once each foreman had taken his number, he was waved out of the herd. I did the selecting of my own, and with the assistance of one man, was constantly waiting my turn. With all the help he could use, Tolleston was over half an hour making his selections, and took the only blind horse in the entire herd. He was a showy animal, a dapple gray, fully fifteen hands high, bred in north Texas, and belonged to one of the whole remudas bought in Dodge. At the time of his purchase, neither Lovell nor Flood detected anything wrong, and no one could see anything in the eyeball which would indicate he was moon-eyed. Yet any horseman need only notice him closely to be satisfied of his defect, as he was constantly shying from other horses and objects and smelled everything which came within his reach. There were probably half a dozen present who knew of his blindness, but not a word was said until all the extras were chosen and the culling out of the overplus of the various remudas began. It started in snickers, and before the cutting back was over developed into peals of laughter, as man after man learned that

the dapple gray in Tolleston's remuda was blind.

Among the very last to become acquainted with the fact was the trail foreman himself. After watching the horse long enough to see his mistake, Tolleston culled the gray back and rode into the herd to claim another. But the drover promptly summoned his foreman out, and, as they met, Lovell said to his trail boss, "Arch, you're no better than anybody else. I bought that gray and paid my good money for him. No doubt but the man who sold him has laughed about it often since, and if ever we meet, I'll take my hat off and compliment him on being the only person who ever sold me a moon-eyed horse. I'm still paying my tuition, and you needn't flare up when the laugh's on you. You have a good remuda without him, and the only way you can get another horse out of that herd is with the permission of Quince Forrest and Tom Quirk."

"Well, if the permission of those new foremen is all I lack, then I'll cut all the horses I want," retorted Tolleston, and galloped back towards the herd. But Quince and I were after him like a flash, followed leisurely by Lovell. As he slacked his mount to enter the mass of animals, I passed him, jerking the bridle reins from his hand. Throwing my horse on his haunches, I turned just as Forrest slapped Tolleston on the back, and said: "Look-ee here, Arch; just because you're a little hot under the collar, don't do anything brash, for fear you may regret it afterward. I'm due to take a little pasear myself this summer, and I always did like to be well mounted. Now, don't get your back up or attempt

to stand up any bluffs, for I can whip you in any sized circle you can name. You never saw me burn powder, did you? Well, just you keep on acting the d— fool if you want a little smoke thrown in your face. Just fool with me and I'll fog you till you look like an angel in the clouds."

But old man Don reached us, and raised his hand. I threw the reins back over the horse's head. Tolleston was white with rage, but before he could speak our employer waved us aside and said, "Tom, you and Quince clear right out of here and I'll settle this matter. Arch, there's your remuda. Take it and go about your business or say you don't want to. Now, we know each other, and I'll not mince or repeat any words with you. Go on."

"Not an inch will I move until I get another horse," hissed Tolleston between gasps. "If it lies between you and me, then I'll have one in place of that gray, or you'll get another foreman. Now, you have my terms and ticket."

"Very well then, Archie; that changes the programme entirely," replied Lovell, firmly. "You'll find your private horse in the small pasture, and we'll excuse you for the summer. Whenever a man in my employ gets the impression that I can't get along without him, that moment he becomes useless to me. It seems that you are bloated with that idea, and a season's rest and quiet may cool you down and make a useful man of you again. Remember that you're always welcome at my ranch, and don't let this make us strangers," he called back as he turned away.

Riding over with us to where a group were sitting on their

horses, our employer scanned the crowd without saying a word. Turning halfway in his saddle, he looked over towards Flood's remuda and said: "One of you boys please ride over and tell Paul I want him." During the rather embarrassing interim, the conversation instantly changed, and we borrowed tobacco and rolled cigarettes to kill time.

Priest was rather slow in making his appearance, riding leisurely, but on coming up innocently inquired of his employer, "Did you want to see me?"

"Yes. Paul, I've just lost one of my foremen. I need a good reliable man to take a herd to Fort Washakie. It's an Indian agency on the head waters of the North Platte in Wyoming. Will you tackle the job?"

"A good soldier is always subject to orders," replied The Rebel with a military salute. "If you have a herd for delivery in Wyoming, give me the men and horses, and I'll put the cattle there if possible. You are the commandant in the field, and I am subject to instructions."

"There's your remuda and outfit, then," said Lovell, pointing to the one intended for Tolleston, "and you'll get a commissary at the ranch and go into camp this evening. You'll get your herd in Nueces County, and Jim will assist in the receiving. Any other little details will all be arranged before you get away."

Calling for all the men in Tolleston's outfit, the two rode away for that remuda. Shortly before the trouble arose, our employer instructed those with the Buford cattle to take ten extra horses

for each herd. There were now over a hundred and forty head to be culled back, and Sponsilier was entitled to ten of them. In order to be sure of our numbers, we counted the remaining band, and Forrest and I trimmed them down to two hundred and fifty-four head. As this number was too small to be handled easily in the open, we decided to take them into the corrals for the final division. After the culling back was over, and everything had started for the ranch, to oblige Sponsilier, I remained behind and helped him to retrim his remuda. Unless one knew the horses personally, it was embarrassing even to try and pick ten of the best ones from the overplus. But I knew many of them at first hand, and at Dave's request, after picking out the extra ones, continued selecting others in exchange for horses in his old band. We spent nearly an hour cutting back and forth, or until we were both satisfied that his saddle stock could not be improved from the material at hand.

The ranch headquarters were fully six miles from the round-up. Leaving Sponsilier delighted with the change in his remuda, I rode to overtake the undivided band which were heading for the ranch corrals. On coming up with them, Forrest proposed that we divide the horses by a running cut in squads of ten, and toss for choice. Once they were in the corrals, this could have been easily done by simply opening a gate and allowing blocks of ten to pass alternately from the main into smaller inclosures. But I was expecting something like this from Quince, and had entirely different plans of my own. Forrest and I were good friends, but he

was a foxy rascal, and I had never wavered in my determination to get the pick of that horse herd. Had I accepted his proposal, the chance of a spinning coin might have given him a decided advantage, and I declined his proposition. I had a remuda in sight that my very being had hungered for, and now I would take no chance of losing it. But on the other hand, I proposed to Forrest that he might have the assistance of two men in Flood's outfit who had accompanied the horse herd home from Dodge. In the selecting of Jim's extra twenty-five, the opinion of these two lads, as the chosen horses proved, was a decided help to their foreman. But Quince stood firm, and arguing the matter, we reached the corrals and penned the band.

The two top bunches were held separate and were left a mile back on the prairie, under herd. The other remudas were all in sight of the ranch, while a majority of the men were eating a late dinner. Still contending for his point, Forrest sent a lad to the house to ask our employer to come over to the corrals. On his appearance, accompanied by Flood, each of us stated our proposition.

"Well, the way I size this up," said old man Don, "one of you wants to rely on his own judgment and the other don't. It looks to me, Quince, you want a gambler's chance where you can't lose. Tom's willing to bank on his own judgment, but you ain't. Now, I like a man who does his own thinking, and to give you a good lesson in that line, why, divide them, horse and horse, turn about. Now, I'll spin this coin for first pick, and while it's in the air, Jim

will call the turn.... Tom wins first choice."

"That's all right, Mr. Lovell," said Quince, smilingly. "I just got the idea that you wanted the remudas for the Buford herds to be equally good. How can you expect it when Tom knows every horse and I never saddled one of them. Give me the same chance, and I might know them as well as the little boy knew his pap."

"You had the same chance," I put in, "but didn't want it. You were offered the Pine Ridge horses last year to take back to Dodge, and you kicked like a bay steer. But I swallowed their dust to the Arkansaw, and from there home we lived in clouds of alkali. You went home drunk and dressed up, with a cigar in your mouth and your feet through the car window, claiming you was a brother-in-law to Jay Gould, and simply out on a tour of inspection. Now you expect me to give you the benefit of my experience and rob myself. Not this summer, John Quincy."

But rather than let Forrest feel that he was being taken advantage of, I repeated my former proposition. Accepting it as a last resort, the two boys were sent for and the dividing commenced. Remounting our horses, we entered the large corral, and as fast as they were selected the different outfits were either roped or driven singly through a guarded gate. It took over an hour of dusty work to make the division, but when it was finished I had a remuda of a hundred and fifty-two saddle horses that would make a man willing to work for his board and the privilege of riding them. Turning out of the corrals, Priest and I accompanied the horses out on the prairie where our toppy ones

were being grazed. Paul was tickled over my outfit of saddle stock, but gave me several hints that he was entitled to another picked mount. I attempted to explain that he had a good remuda, but he still insisted, and I promised him if he would be at my wagon the next morning when we corralled, he should have a good one. I could well afford to be generous with my old bunkie.

There now only remained the apportionment of the work-stock. Four mules were allowed to the wagon, and in order to have them in good condition they had been grain-fed for the past month. In their allotment the Buford herds were given the best teams, and when mine was pointed out by my employer, the outfit assisted the cook to harness in. Giving him instructions to go into camp on a creek three miles south of headquarters, my wagon was the second one to get away. Some of the teams bolted at the start, and only for timely assistance Sponsilier's commissary would have been overturned in the sand. Two of the wagons headed west for Uvalde, while my brother Bob's started southeast for Bee County. The other two belonging to Flood and The Rebel would camp on the same creek as mine, their herds being also south. Once the wagons were off, the saddle stock was brought in and corralled for our first mounts. The final allotment of horses to the men would not take place until the herds were ready to be received, and until then, they would be ridden uniformly but promiscuously. With instructions from our employer to return to the ranch after making camp, the remudas were started after the wagons.

On our return after darkness, the ranch was as deserted as a school-house on Saturday. A Mexican cook and a few regular ranch hands were all that were left. Archie Tolleston had secured his horse and quit headquarters before any one had even returned from the round-up. When the last of the foremen came in, our employer delivered his final messages. "Boys," said he, "I'll only detain you a few minutes. I'm going west in the morning to Uvalde County, and will be present at the receiving of Quince and Dave's herds. After they start, I'll come back to the city and take stage to Oakville. But you go right ahead and receive your cattle, Bob, for we don't know what may turn up. Flood will help Tom first, and then Paul, to receive their cattle. That will give the Buford herds the first start, and I'll be waiting for you at Abilene when you reach there. And above all else, boys, remember that I've strained my credit in this drive, and that the cattle must be A 1, and that we must deliver them on the spot in prime condition. Now, that's all, but you'd better be riding so as to get an early start in the morning."

Our employer walked with us to the outer gate where our horses stood at the hitch-rack. That he was reticent in his business matters was well known among all his old foremen, including Forrest and myself. If he had a confidant among his men, Jim Flood was the man—and there were a few things he did not know. As we mounted our horses to return to our respective camps, old man Don quietly took my bridle reins in hand and allowed the others to ride away. "I want a parting word with

you, Tom," said he a moment later. "Something has happened to-day which will require the driving of the Buford herds in some road brand other than the 'Circle Dot.' The first blacksmith shop you pass, have your irons altered into 'Open A's,' and I'll do the same with Quince and Dave's brands. Of the why or wherefore of this, say nothing to any one, as no one but myself knows. Don't breathe a word even to Flood, for he don't know any more than he should. When the time comes, if it ever does, you'll know all that is necessary—or nothing. That's all."

CHAPTER III. RECEIVING AT LOS LOBOS

The trip to Lasalle County was mere pastime. All three of the outfits kept in touch with each other, camping far enough apart to avoid any conflict in night-herding the remudas. The only incident to mar the pleasure of the outing was the discovery of ticks in many of our horses' ears. The pasture in which they had wintered was somewhat brushy, and as there had been no frost to kill insect life, myriads of seed-ticks had dropped from the mesquite thickets upon the animals when rubbing against or passing underneath them. As the inner side of a horse's ear is both warm and tender, that organ was frequently infested with this pest, whose ravages often undermined the supporting cartilages and produced the drooping or "gotch" ear. In my remuda over one half the horses were afflicted with ticks, and many of them it was impossible to bridle, owing to the inflamed condition of their ears. Fortunately we had with us some standard preparations for blistering, so, diluting this in axle-grease, we threw every animal thus affected and thoroughly swabbed his ears. On reaching the Nueces River, near the western boundary of Lasalle County, the other two outfits continued on down that stream for their destination in the lower country. Flood remained behind with me, and going into camp on the river with my outfit,

the two of us rode over to Los Lobos Ranch and announced ourselves as ready to receive the cattle. Dr. Beaver, the seller of the herd, was expecting us, and sending word of our arrival to neighboring cowmen, we looked over the corrals before returning to camp. They had built a new branding-chute and otherwise improved their facilities for handling cattle. The main inclosure had been built of heavy palisades in an early day, but recently several of smaller sized lumber had been added, making the most complete corrals I had ever seen. An abundance of wood was at hand for heating the branding-irons, and every little detail to facilitate the work had been provided for. Giving notice that we would receive every morning on the open prairie only, we declined an invitation to remain at the ranch and returned to my wagon.

In the valley the grass was well forward. We had traveled only some twenty miles a day coming down, and our horses had fared well. But as soon as we received any cattle, night-herding the remuda would cease, and we must either hobble or resort to other measures. John Levering was my horse-wrangler. He had made two trips over the trail with Fant's herds in the same capacity, was careful, humane, and an all-round horseman. In employing a cook, I had given the berth to Neal Parent, an old boyhood chum of mine. He never amounted to much as a cow-hand, but was a lighthearted, happy fool; and as cooking did not require much sense, I gave him the chance to make his first trip. Like a court jester, he kept the outfit in fine spirits and was the butt of

all jokes. In entertaining company he was in a class by himself, and spoke with marked familiarity of all the prominent cowmen in southern Texas. To a stranger the inference might be easily drawn that Lovell was in his employ.

As we were expecting to receive cattle on the third day, the next morning the allotment of horses was made. The usual custom of giving the foreman first choice was claimed, and I cut twelve of solid colors but not the largest ones. Taking turns, the outfit roped out horse after horse until only the ten extra ones were left. In order that these should bear a fair share in the work, I took one of them for a night-horse and allotted the others to the second, third, and last guard in a similar capacity. This gave the last three watches two horses apiece for night work, but with the distinct understanding that in case of accident or injury to any horse in the remuda, they could be recalled. There was little doubt that before the summer ended, they would be claimed to fill vacancies in the regular mounts. Flood had kept behind only two horses with which to overtake the other outfits, and during his stay with us would ride these extras and loans from my mount.

The entire morning was spent working with the remuda. Once a man knew his mount, extra attention was shown each horse. There were witches' bridles to be removed from their manes, extra long tails were thinned out to the proper length, and all hoofs trimmed short. The horses were fast shedding their winter coats, matting the saddle blankets with falling hair, and unless carefully watched, galled backs would result. The branding-irons

had been altered en route, and about noon a vaquero came down the river and reported that the second round-up of the day would meet just over the county line in Dimmit. He belonged at Los Lobos, and reported the morning rodeo as containing over five hundred beeves, which would be ready for delivery at our pleasure. We made him remain for dinner, after which Flood and I saddled up and returned with him. We reached the round-up just as the cutting-out finished. They were a fine lot of big rangy beeves, and Jim suggested that we pass upon them at once. The seller agreed to hold them overnight, and Flood and I culled back about one hundred and twenty which were under age or too light. The round-up outfit strung the cattle out and counted them, reporting a few over seven hundred head. This count was merely informal and for the information of the seller; but in the morning the final one would be made, in which we could take a hand.

After the cut had started in for the ranch, we loitered along, looking them over, and I noticed several that might have been thrown out. "Well, now," said Flood, "if you are going to be so very choice as all that, I might as well ride on. You can't use me if that bunch needs any more trimming. I call them a fine lot of beeves. It's all right for Don to rib the boys up and make them think that the cattle have to be top-notchers. I've watched him receive too often; he's about the easiest man I know to ring in short ages on. Just so a steer looks nice, it's hard for the old man to turn one back. I've seen him receiving three-year-olds, when one fourth of the cattle passed on were short twos. And if you call

his attention to one, he'll just smile that little smile of his, and say, 'yes, he may be shy a few months, but he'll grow.' But then that's just old man Don's weakness for cattle; he can't look a steer in the face without falling in love with him. Now, I've received before when by throwing out one half the stock offered, you couldn't get as uniform a bunch of beeves as those are. But you go right ahead, Tom, and be sure that every hoof you accept will dress five hundred pounds at Fort Buford. I'll simply sit around and clerk and help you count and give you a good chance to make a reputation."

Los Lobos was still an open range. They claimed to have over ten thousand mixed cattle in the straight ranch brand. There had been no demand for matured beeves for several years, and now on effecting this sale they were anxious to deliver all their grown steers. Dr. Beaver informed us that, previous to our arrival, his foreman had been throwing everything in on the home range, and that he hoped to deliver to us over two thousand head from his own personal holdings. But he was liberal with his neighbors, for in the contingent just passed upon, there must have been over a hundred head in various ranch brands. Assuring him that we would be on hand in the morning to take possession of the cattle, and requesting him to have a fire burning, on coming opposite the camp, we turned off and rode for our wagon. It meant a big day's work to road-brand this first contingent, and with the first sign of dawn, my outfit were riding for Los Lobos. We were encamped about three miles from the corrals, and leaving

orders for the cook to follow up, the camp was abandoned with the exception of the remuda. It was barely sun-up when we counted and took possession of the beeves. On being relieved, the foreman of Los Lobos took the ranch outfit and started off to renew the gathering. We penned the cattle without any trouble, and as soon as the irons were ready, a chute was run in and the branding commenced. This branding-chute was long enough to chamber eight beeves. It was built about a foot wide at the bottom and flared upward just enough to prevent an animal from turning round. A heavy gate closed the exit, while bull-bars at the rear prevented the occupant from backing out. A high platform ran along either side of the branding-chute, on which the men stood while handling the irons.

Two men did the branding. "Runt" Pickett attended the fire, passing up the heated irons, and dodging the cold branding-steel. A single iron was often good for several animals, and sometimes a chute was branded with two irons. It was necessary that the work should be well done; not that a five months' trip required it, but the unforeseen must be guarded against. Many trail herds had met disaster and been scattered to the four winds with nothing but a road brand to identify them afterward. The cattle were changing owners, and custom decreed that an abstract of title should be indelibly seared on their sides. The first guard, Jake Blair, Morg Tussler, and Clay Zilligan, were detailed to cut and drive the squads into the chute. These three were the only mounted men, the others being placed so as to facilitate the work.

Cattle are as innocent as they are strong, and in this necessary work everything was done quietly, care being taken to prevent them from becoming excited. As fast as they were released from the chute, Dr. Beaver took a list of the ranch brands, in order to bill of sale them to Lovell and settle with his neighbors.

The work moved with alacrity. As one chuteful was being freed the next one was entering. Gates closed in their faces and the bull-bars at the rear locked them as in a vice. We were averaging a hundred an hour, but the smoke from the burning hair was offensive to the lungs. During the forenoon Burl Van Vedder and Vick Wolf "spelled" Flood and myself for half an hour at a time, or until we could recover from the nauseous fumes. When the cook called us to dinner, we had turned out nearly five hundred branded cattle. No sooner was the midday meal bolted than the cook was ordered back to camp with his wagon, the branded contingent of cattle following in charge of the first guard. Less than half an hour was lost in refreshing the inner man, and ordering "G—G" Cederdall, Tim Stanley, and Jack Splann of the second guard into their saddles to take the place of the relieved men, we resumed our task. The dust of the corrals settled on us unheeded, the smoke of the fire mingled with that of the singeing hair and its offensive odors, bringing tears to our eyes, but the work never abated until the last steer had passed the chute and bore the "Open A."

The work over, a pretense was made at washing the dust and grime from our faces. It was still early in the day, and starting

the cattle for camp, I instructed the boys to water and graze them as long as they would stand up. The men all knew their places on guard, this having been previously arranged; and joining Dr. Beaver, Jim and I rode for the ranch about a mile distant. The doctor was a genial host, and prescribed a series of mint-juleps, after which he proposed that we ride out and meet the cattle gathered during the day. The outfit had been working a section of country around some lagoons, south of the ranch, and it was fully six o'clock when we met them, heading homeward. The cattle were fully up to the standard of the first bunch, and halting the herd we trimmed them down and passed on them. After Flood rode out of this second contingent, I culled back about a dozen light weights. On finishing, Jim gave me a quiet wink, and said something to Dr. Beaver about a new broom. But I paid no attention to these remarks; in a country simply teeming with prime beeves, I was determined to get a herd to my liking. Dr. Beaver had assured Lovell that he and his neighbors would throw together over four thousand beeves in making up the herd, and now I was perfectly willing that they should. It would take two days longer to gather the cattle on the Los Lobos range, and then there were the outside offerings, which were supposed to number fully two thousand. There was no excuse for not being choice.

On returning to Los Lobos about dusk, rather than offend its owner, Flood consented to remain at the ranch overnight, but I rode for camp. Darkness had fallen on my reaching the wagon, the herd had been bedded down, and Levering felt so confident

that the remuda was contented that he had concluded to night-herd them himself until midnight, and then turn them loose until dawn. He had belled a couple of the leaders, and assured me that he would have them in hand before sun-up. The cook was urging me to supper, but before unsaddling, I rode around both herd and remuda. The cattle were sleeping nicely, and the boys assured me that they had got a splendid fill on them before bedding down. That was the only safe thing to do, and after circling the saddle stock on the opposite side of camp, I returned to find that a stranger had arrived during my brief absence. Parent had fully enlightened him as to who he was, who the outfit were, the destination of the herd, the names of both buyer and seller, and, on my riding in, was delivering a voluble dissertation on the tariff and the possible effect on the state of putting hides on the free list. And although in cow-camps a soldier's introduction is usually sufficient, the cook inquired the stranger's name and presented me to our guest with due formality. Supper being waiting, the stranger was invited to take pot-luck with us, and before the meal was over recognized me. He was a deputy cattle inspector for Dimmit County, and had issued the certificate for Flood's herd the year before. He had an eye for the main chance, and informed me that fully one half the cattle making up our herd belonged to Dimmit; that the county line was only a mile up the river, and that if I would allow the herd to drift over into his territory, he would shade the legal rate. The law compelling the inspection of herds before they could be moved out of the county, like the rain,

fell upon the just and the unjust. It was not the intent of the law to impose a burden on an honest drover. Yet he was classed with the rustler, and must have in his possession a certificate of inspection before he could move out a purchased herd, or be subject to arrest. A list of brands was recorded, at the county seat, of every herd leaving, and if occasion required could be referred to in future years. No railroad would receive any consignment of hides or live stock, unless accompanied by a certificate from the county inspector. The legal rate was ten cents on the first hundred, and three cents on all over that number, frequently making the office a lucrative one.

Once the object of his call was made clear, I warmed to our guest. If the rate allowed by law was enforced, it meant an expense of over a hundred dollars for a certificate of inspection covering both herd and saddle stock. We did not take out certificates in Medina on the remudas as a matter of economy. By waiting until the herd was ready, the two would be inspected as one, and the lower rate apply. So I urged the deputy to make himself at home and share my blankets. Pretending that I remembered him well, I made numerous inquiries about the ranch where we received our herd the year before, and by the time to turn in, we were on the most friendly terms. The next morning I offered him a horse from our extras, assuring him that Flood would be delighted to renew his acquaintance, and invited him to go with us for the day. Turning his horse among ours, he accepted and rode away with us. The cattle passed on the evening

before had camped out several miles from the corrals and were grazing in when we met them. Flood and the Doctor joined us shortly afterward, and I had a quiet word with Jim before he and the inspector met. After the count was over, Flood made a great ado over my guest and gave him the glad hand as if he had been a long-lost brother. We were a trifle short-handed the second day, and on my guest volunteering to help, I assigned him to Runt Pickett's place at the fire, where he shortly developed a healthy sweat. As we did not have a large bunch of beeves to brand that day, the wagon did not come over and we branded them at a single shift. It was nearly one o'clock when we finished, and instead of going in to Los Lobos, we left the third guard, Wayne Outcault, "Dorg" Seay, and Owen Ubery, to graze the cattle over to our camp.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in idleness and in the entertainment of our guest. Official-like, he pretended he could hardly spare the time to remain another night, but was finally prevailed on and did so. After dark, I took him some distance from camp, and the two of us had a confidential chat. I assured him if there was any object in doing so, we could move camp right to or over the county line, and frankly asked him what inducement he would offer. At first he thought that throwing off everything over a hundred dollars would be about right. But I assured him that there were whole families of inspectors in Lasalle County who would discount that figure, and kindly advised him, if he really wanted the fee, to meet

competition at least. We discussed the matter at length, and before returning to camp, he offered to make out the certificate, covering everything, for fifty dollars. As it was certain to be several days yet before we would start, and there was a prospect of a falling market in certificates of inspection, I would make no definite promises. The next morning I insisted that he remain at some near-by ranch in his own territory, and, if convenient, ride down every few days and note the progress of the herd.

We were promised a large contingent of cattle for that day. The ranch outfit were to make three rodeos down the river the day before, where the bulk of their beeves ranged. Flood was anxious to overtake the other outfits before they reached the lower country, and as he assured me I had no further use for him, we agreed that after receiving that morning he might leave us. Giving orders at camp to graze the received beeves within a mile of the corrals by noon, and the wagon to follow, we made an early start, Flood taking his own horses with him. We met the cattle coming up the river a thousand strong. It was late when the last round-up of the day before had finished, and they had camped for the night fully five miles from the corrals. It took less than an hour to cull back and count, excuse the ranch outfit, and start this contingent for the branding-pens in charge of my boys. Flood was in a hurry, and riding a short distance with him, I asked that he pass or send word to the county seat, informing the inspector of hides and animals that a trail herd would leave Los Lobos within a week. Jim knew my motive in getting competition on

the inspection, and wishing me luck on my trip, I wrung his hand in farewell until we should meet again in the upper country.

The sun was setting that night when we finished road-branding the last of the beeves received in the morning. After dinner, when the wagon returned to camp, I instructed Parent to move up the river fully a mile. We needed the change, anyhow, and even if it was farther, the next morning we would have the Los Lobos outfit to assist in the branding, as that day would finish their gathering. The outside cattle were beginning to report in small bunches, from three hundred upward. Knowing that Dr. Beaver was anxious to turn in as many as possible of his own, we delayed receiving from the neighboring ranches for another day. But the next morning, as we were ironing-up the last contingent of some four hundred Los Lobos beeves, a deputy inspector for Lasalle arrived from the county seat. He was likewise officious, and professed disappointment that the herd was not ready to pass upon. On his arrival, I was handling the irons, and paid no attention to him until the branding was over for the morning. When he introduced himself, I cordially greeted him, but at the first intimation of disappointment from his lips, I checked him.

Using the best diplomacy at my command, I said, "Well, I'm sorry to cause you this long ride when it might have been avoided. You see, we are receiving cattle from both this and Dimmit County. In fact, we are holding our herd across the line just at present. On starting, we expect to go up the river to the first creek, and north on it to the Leona River. I have partially

promised the work to an inspector from Dimmit. He inspected our herd last year, and being a personal friend that way, you couldn't meet his figures. Very sorry to disappoint you, but won't you come over to the wagon and stay all night?"

But Dr. Beaver, who understood my motive, claimed the privilege of entertaining the deputy at Los Lobos, and I yielded. We now had a few over twenty-four hundred beeves, of which nineteen hundred were in the Los Lobos brand, the others being mixed. There was a possibility of fully a hundred more coming in with the neighboring cattle, and Dr. Beaver was delighted over the ranch delivery. The outside contingents were in four bunches, then encamped in different directions and within from three to five miles of the ranch. Taking Vick Wolf with me for the afternoon, I looked over the separate herds and found them numbering more than fifteen hundred. They were the same uniform Nueces Valley cattle, and as we lacked only a few over a thousand, the offerings were extremely liberal. Making arrangements with three of the four herds to receive the next day, Vick and I reached our camp on the county line about sunset. The change was a decided advantage; wood, water, and grass were plentiful, and not over a mile farther from the branding-pens.

The next morning found us in our saddles at the usual early hour. We were anxious to receive and brand every animal possible that day, so that with a few hours' work the next forenoon the herd would be ready to start. After we had passed on the first contingent of the outside cattle, and as we were nearing

the corrals, Dr. Beaver overtook us. Calling me aside, he said: "Quirk, if you play your cards right, you'll get a certificate of inspection for nothing and a chromo as a pelon. I've bolstered up the Lasalle man that he's better entitled to the work than the Dimmit inspector, and he'll wait until the herd is ready to start. Now, you handle the one, and I'll keep the other as my guest. We must keep them apart and let them buck each other to their hearts' content. Every hoof in your herd will be in a ranch brand of record; but still the law demands inspection and you must comply with it. I'll give you a duplicate list of the brands, so that neither inspector need see the herd, and if we don't save your employer a hundred dollars, then we are amateurs."

Everything was pointing to an auspicious start. The last cattle on the delivery were equal to the first, if not better. The sky clouded over, and before noon a light shower fell, settling the dust in the corrals. Help increased as the various bunches were accepted, and at the end of the day only a few over two hundred remained to complete our numbers. The last contingent were fully up to the standard; and rather than disappoint the sellers, I accepted fifty head extra, making my herd at starting thirty-four hundred and fifty. When the last beef had passed the branding-chute, there was nothing remaining but to give a receipt to the seller for the number of head received, in behalf of my employer, pending a later settlement between them.

Meanwhile competition in the matter of inspection had been carefully nursed. Conscious of each other's presence, and both

equally anxious for the fee, the one deputy was entertained at my camp and the other at Los Lobos. They were treated courteously, but given to understand that in the present instance money talked. With but a small bunch of beeves to brand on the starting day, the direction in which the herd was allowed to leave the bed-ground would be the final answer. If west, Dimmit had underbid Lasalle; if the contrary, then the departure of this herd would be a matter of record in the latter county. Dr. Beaver enjoyed the situation hugely, acting the intermediary in behalf of his guest. Personally I was unconcerned, but was neutral and had little to say.

My outfit understood the situation perfectly. Before retiring on the night of our last camp on the county line, and in the presence of the Dimmit inspector, the last relief received instructions, in the absence of contrary orders, to allow the herd to drift back into Lasalle in the morning. Matters were being conducted in pantomime, and the players understood their parts. Our guest had made himself useful in various ways, and I naturally felt friendly towards him. He had stood several guards for the boys, and Burl Van Vedder, of the last watch, had secret instructions to call him for that guard.

The next morning the camp was not astir as early as usual. On the cook's arousing us, in the uncertain light of dawn, the herd was slowly rising, and from the position of a group of four horsemen, it was plainly evident that our guest had shaded all competition. Our camp was in plain view of Los Lobos, and only some five or six miles distant. With the rising of the sun, and

from the top of a windmill derrick, by the aid of a field-glass, the Lasalle inspector had read his answer; and after the work in the morning was over, and the final papers had been exchanged, Dr. Beaver insisted that, in commiseration of his departed guest, just one more mint-julep should be drunk standing.

When Don Lovell glanced over my expense account on our arrival at Abilene, he said: "Look here, Tom, is this straight?—twenty dollars for inspection?—the hell you say! Corrupted them, did you? Well, that's the cheapest inspection I ever paid, with one exception. Dave Sponsilier once got a certificate for his herd for five dollars and a few drinks. But he paid for it a month in advance of the starting of the herd. It was dated ahead, properly sealed, and all ready for filling in the brands and numbers. The herd was put up within a mile of where four counties cornered, and that inspector was a believer in the maxim of the early bird. The office is a red-tape one, anyhow, and little harm in taking all the advantage you can.—This item marked 'sundries' was DRY goods, I suppose? All right, Quirk; I reckon rattlesnakes were rather rabid this spring."

CHAPTER IV. MINGLING WITH THE EXODUS

By noon the herd had grazed out five miles on its way. The boys were so anxious to get off that on my return the camp was deserted with the exception of the cook and the horse-wrangler, none even returning for dinner. Before leaving I had lunched at Los Lobos with its owner, and on reaching the wagon, Levering and I assisted the cook to harness in and start the commissary. The general course of the Nueces River was southeast by northwest, and as our route lay on the latter angle, the herd would follow up the valley for the first day. Once outside the boundaries of our camp of the past week, the grass matted the ground with its rank young growth. As far as the eye could see, the mesas, clothed in the verdure of spring, rolled in long swells away to the divides. Along the river and in the first bottom, the timber and mesquite thickets were in leaf and blossom, while on the outlying prairies the only objects which dotted this sea of green were range cattle and an occasional band of horses.

The start was made on the 27th of March. By easy drives and within a week, we crossed the "Sunset" Railway, about thirty miles to the westward of the ranch in Medina. On reaching the divide between the Leona and Frio rivers, we sighted our first herd of trail cattle, heading northward. We learned that

some six herds had already passed upward on the main Frio, while a number of others were reported as having taken the east fork of that river. The latter stream almost paralleled the line between Medina and Uvalde counties, and as we expected some word from headquarters, we crossed over to the east fork. When westward of and opposite the ranch, Runt Pickett was sent in for any necessary orders that might be waiting. By leaving us early in the evening he could reach headquarters that night and overtake us before noon the next day. We grazed leisurely forward the next morning, killing as much time as possible, and Pickett overtook us before the wagon had even gone into camp for dinner. Lovell had not stopped on his return from the west, but had left with the depot agent at the home station a letter for the ranch. From its contents we learned that the other two Buford herds had started from Uvalde, Sponsilier in the lead, one on the 24th and the other the following day. Local rumors were encouraging in regard to grass and water to the westward, and the intimation was clear that if favorable reports continued, the two Uvalde herds would intersect an old trail running from the head of Nueces Canon to the Llano River. Should they follow this route there was little hope of their coming into the main western trail before reaching the Colorado River. Sponsilier was a daring fellow, and if there was a possible chance to get through beyond the borders of any settlement, he was certain to risk it.

The letter contained no personal advice. Years of experience in trail matters had taught my employer that explicit orders

were often harmful. The emergencies to be met were of such a varied nature that the best method was to trust to an outfit worming its way out of any situation which confronted it. From the information disclosed, it was evident that the other Buford herds were then somewhere to the northwest, and possibly over a hundred miles distant. Thus freed from any restraint, we held a due northward course for several days, or until we encountered some rocky country. Water was plentiful and grass fairly good, but those flinty hills must be avoided or sorefooted beeves would be the result. I had seen trails of blood left by cattle from sandy countries on encountering rock, and now the feet of ours were a second consideration to their stomachs. But long before the herd reached this menace, Morg Tussler and myself, scouting two full days in advance, located a safe route to the westward. Had we turned to the other hand, we should have been forced into the main trail below Fredericksburg, and we preferred the sea-room of the boundless plain. From every indication and report, this promised to be the banner year in the exodus of cattle from the South to the then new Northwest. This latter section was affording the long-looked-for outlet, by absorbing the offerings of cattle which came up from Texas over the trail, and marking an epoch barely covering a single decade.

Turning on a western angle, a week's drive brought us out on a high tableland. Veering again to the north, we snailed along through a delightful country, rich in flora and the freshness of the season. From every possible elevation, we scanned the west in

the hope of sighting some of the herd which had followed up the main Frio, but in vain. Sweeping northward at a leisurely gait, the third week out we sighted the Blue Mountains, the first familiar landmark on our course. As the main western trail skirted its base on the eastward, our position was easily established.

So far the cattle were well behaved, not a run, and only a single incident occurring worth mention. About half an hour before dawn one morning, the cook aroused the camp with the report that the herd was missing. The beeves had been bedded within two hundred yards of the wagon, and the last watch usually hailed the rekindling of the cook's fire as the first harbinger of day. But on this occasion the absence of the usual salutations from the bed-ground aroused Parent's suspicion. He rushed into camp, and laboring under the impression that the cattle had stampeded, trampled over our beds, yelling at the top of his lungs. Aroused in the darkness from heavy sleep, bewildered by a bright fire burning and a crazy man shouting, "The beeves have stampeded! the herd's gone! Get up, everybody!" we were almost thrown into a panic. Many of the boys ran for their night-horses, but Clay Zilligan and I fell on the cook and shook the statement out of him that the cattle had left their beds. This simplified the situation, but before I could recall the men, several of them had reached the bed-ground. As fast as horses could be secured, others dashed through the lighted circle and faded into the darkness. From the flickering of matches it was evident that the boys were dismounting and looking for some sign of trouble.

Zilligan was swearing like a pirate, looking for his horse in the murky night; but instead of any alarm, oaths and derision greeted our ears as the men returned to camp. Halting their horses within the circle of the fire, Dorg Seay said to the cook:

"Neal, the next time you find a mare's nest, keep the secret to yourself. I don't begrudge losing thirty minutes' beauty sleep, but I hate to be scared out of a year's growth. Haven't you got cow-sense enough to know that if those beeves had run, they'd have shook the earth? If they had stampeded, that alarm clock of yours wouldn't be a circumstance to the barking of the boys' guns. Why, the cattle haven't been gone thirty minutes. You can see where they got up and then quietly walked away. The ground where they lay is still steaming and warm. They were watered a little too soon yesterday and naturally got up early this morning. The boys on guard didn't want to alarm the outfit, and just allowed the beeves to graze off on their course. When day breaks, you'll see they ain't far away, and in the right direction. Parent, if I didn't sabe cows better than you do, I'd confine my attention to a cotton patch."

Seay had read the sign aright. When day dawned the cattle were in plain view about a mile distant. On the return of the last guard to camp, Vick Wolf explained the situation in a few words. During their watch the herd had grown restless, many of the cattle arising; and knowing that dawn was near at hand, the boys had pushed the sleepy ones off their beds and started them feeding. The incident had little effect on the irrepressible Parent,

who seemed born to blunder, yet gifted with a sunny disposition which atoned for his numerous mistakes.

With the Blue Mountains as our guiding star, we kept to the westward of that landmark, crossing the Llano River opposite some Indian mounds. On reaching the divide between this and the next water, we sighted two dust-clouds to the westward. They were ten to fifteen miles distant, but I was anxious to hear any word of Sponsilier or Forrest, and sent Jake Blair to make a social call. He did not return until the next day, and reported the first herd as from the mouth of the Pecos, and the more distant one as belonging to Jesse Presnall. Blair had stayed all night with the latter, and while its foreman was able to locate at least a dozen trail herds in close proximity, our two from Uvalde had neither been seen nor heard of. Baffled again, necessity compelled us to turn within touch of some outfitting point. The staples of life were running low in our commissary, no opportunity having presented itself to obtain a new supply since we left the ranch in Medina over a month before. Consequently, after crossing the San Saba, we made our first tack to the eastward.

Brady City was an outfitting point for herds on the old western trail. On coming opposite that frontier village, Parent and I took the wagon and went in after supplies, leaving the herd on its course, paralleling the former route. They had instructions to camp on Brady Creek that night. On reaching the supply point, there was a question if we could secure the simple staples needed. The drive that year had outstripped all calculations, some half-

dozen chuck-wagons being in waiting for the arrival of a freight outfit which was due that morning. The nearest railroad was nearly a hundred miles to the eastward, and all supplies must be freighted in by mule and ox teams. While waiting for the freight wagons, which were in sight several miles distant, I made inquiry of the two outfitting stores if our Buford herds had passed. If they had, no dealings had taken place on the credit of Don Lovell, though both merchants knew him well. Before the freight outfit arrived, some one took Abb Blocker, a trail foreman for his brother John, to task for having an odd ox in his wheel team. The animal was a raw, unbroken "7L" bull, surly and chafing under the yoke, and attracted general attention. When several friends of Blocker, noticing the brand, began joking him, he made this explanation: "No, I don't claim him; but he came into my herd the other night and got to hossing my steers around. We couldn't keep him out, and I thought if he would just go along, why we'd put him under the yoke and let him hoss that chuck-wagon to amuse himself. One of my wheelers was getting a little tenderfooted, anyhow."

On the arrival of the freight outfit, short shift was made in transferring a portion of the cargo to the waiting chuck-wagons. As we expected to reach Abilene, a railroad point, within a week, we took on only a small stock of staple supplies. Having helped ourselves, the only delay was in getting a clerk to look over our appropriation, make out an itemized bill, and receive a draft on my employer. When finally the merchant in person climbed into

our wagon and took a list of the articles, Parent started back to overtake the herd. I remained behind several hours, chatting with the other foremen.

None of the other trail bosses had seen anything of Lovell's other herds, though they all knew him personally or by reputation, and inquired if he was driving again in the same road brand. By general agreement, in case of trouble, we would pick up each other's cattle; and from half a cent to a cent a head was considered ample remuneration in buying water in Texas. Owing to the fact that many drovers had shipped to Red River, it was generally believed that there would be no congestion of cattle south of that point. All herds were then keeping well to the westward, some even declaring their intention to go through the Panhandle until the Canadian was reached.

Two days later we came into the main trail at the crossing of the Colorado River. Before we reached it, several ominous dust-clouds hung on our right for hours, while beyond the river were others, indicating the presence of herds. Summer weather had already set in, and during the middle of the day the glare of heat-waves and mirages obstructed our view of other wayfarers like ourselves, but morning and evening we were never out of sight of their signals. The banks of the river at the ford were trampled to the level of the water, while at both approach and exit the ground was cut into dust. On our arrival, the stage of water was favorable, and we crossed without a halt of herd, horses, or commissary. But there was little inducement to follow the old trail. Washed

into ruts by the seasons, the grass on either side eaten away for miles, there was a look of desolation like that to be seen in the wake of an army. As we felt under obligations to touch at Abilene within a few days, there was a constant skirmish for grass within a reasonable distance of the trail; and we were early, fully two thirds of the drive being in our rear. One sultry morning south of Buffalo Gap, as we were grazing past the foot of Table Mountain, several of us rode to the summit of that butte. From a single point of observation we counted twelve herds within a space of thirty miles both south and north, all moving in the latter direction.

When about midway between the Gap and the railroad we were met at noon one day by Don Lovell. This was his first glimpse of my herd, and his experienced eye took in everything from a broken harness to the peeling and legibility of the road brand. With me the condition of the cattle was the first requisite, but the minor details as well as the more important claimed my employer's attention. When at last, after riding with the herd for an hour, he spoke a few words of approbation on the condition, weight, and uniformity of the beeves, I felt a load lifted from my shoulders. That the old man was in a bad humor on meeting us was evident; but as he rode along beside the cattle, lazy and large as oxen, the cockles of his heart warmed and he grew sociable. Near the middle of the afternoon, as we were in the rear, looking over the drag steers, he complimented me on having the fewest tender-footed animals of any herd that had passed Abilene since his arrival. Encouraged, I ventured the double question

as to how this one would average with the other Buford herds, and did he know their whereabouts. As I recall his reply, it was that all Nueces Valley cattle were uniform, and if there was any difference it was due to carelessness in receiving. In regard to the locality of the other herds, it was easily to be seen that he was provoked about something.

"Yes, I know where they are," said he, snappishly, "but that's all the good it does me. They crossed the railroad, west, at Sweetwater, about a week ago. I don't blame Quince, for he's just trailing along, half a day behind Dave's herd. But Sponsilier, knowing that I wanted to see him, had the nerve to write me a postal card with just ten words on it, saying that all was well and to meet him in Dodge. Tom, you don't know what a satisfaction it is to me to spend a day or so with each of the herds. But those rascals didn't pay any more attention to me than if I was an old woman. There was some reason for it—sore-footed cattle, or else they have skinned up their remudas and didn't want me to see them. If I drive a hundred herds hereafter, Dave Sponsilier will stay at home as far as I'm concerned. He may think it's funny to slip past, but this court isn't indulging in any levity just at present. I fail to see the humor in having two outfits with sixty-seven hundred cattle somewhere between the Staked Plain and No-Man's-Land, and unable to communicate with them. And while my herds are all contracted, mature beeves have broke from three to five dollars a head in price since these started, and it won't do to shout before we're out of the woods. Those fool boys don't

know that, and I can't get near enough to tell them."

I knew better than to ask further questions or offer any apologies for others. My employer was naturally irritable, and his abuse or praise of a foreman was to be expected. Previously and under the smile of prosperity, I had heard him laud Sponsilier, and under an imaginary shadow abuse Jim Flood, the most experienced man in his employ. Feeling it was useless to pour oil on the present troubled waters, I excused myself, rode back, and ordered the wagon to make camp ahead about four miles on Elm Creek. We watered late in the afternoon, grazing thence until time to bed the herd. When the first and second guards were relieved to go in and catch night-horses and get their supper, my employer remained behind with the cattle. While feeding during the evening, we allowed the herd to scatter over a thousand acres. Taking advantage of the loose order of the beeves, the old man rode back and forth through them until approaching darkness compelled us to throw them together on the bedground. Even after the first guard took charge, the drover loitered behind, reluctant to leave until the last steer had lain down; and all during the night, sharing my blankets, he awoke on every change of guards, inquiring of the returning watch how the cattle were sleeping.

As we should easily pass Abilene before noon, I asked him as a favor that he take the wagon in and get us sufficient supplies to last until Red River was reached. But he preferred to remain behind with the herd, and I went instead. This suited me, as his

presence overawed my outfit, who were delirious to see the town. There was no telling how long he would have stayed with us, but my brother Bob's herd was expected at any time. Remaining with us a second night, something, possibly the placidness of the cattle, mellowed the old man and he grew amiable with the outfit, and myself in particular. At breakfast the next morning, when I asked him if he was in a position to recommend any special route, he replied:

"No, Tom, that rests with you. One thing's certain; herds are going to be dangerously close together on the regular trail which crosses Red River at Doan's. The season is early yet, but over fifty herds have already crossed the Texas Pacific Railway. Allowing one half the herds to start north of that line, it gives you a fair idea what to expect. When seven hundred thousand cattle left Texas two years ago, it was considered the banner year, yet it won't be a marker to this one. The way prices are tumbling shows that the Northwest was bluffing when they offered to mature all the cattle that Texas could breed for the next fifty years. That's the kind of talk that suits me, but last year there were some forty herds unsold, which were compelled to winter in the North. Not over half the saddle horses that came up the trail last summer were absorbed by these Northern cowmen. Talk's cheap, but it takes money to buy whiskey. Lots of these men are new ones at the business and may lose fortunes. The banks are getting afraid of cattle paper, and conditions are tightening. With the increased drive this year, if the summer passes without a slaughter in prices,

the Texas drovers can thank their lucky stars. I'm not half as bright as I might be, but this is one year that I'm smooth enough not to have unsold cattle on the trail."

The herd had started an hour before, and when the wagon was ready to move, I rode a short distance with my employer. It was possible that he had something to say of a confidential nature, for it was seldom that he acted so discouraged when his every interest seemed protected by contracts. But at the final parting, when we both had dismounted and sat on the ground for an hour, he had disclosed nothing. On the contrary, he even admitted that possibly it was for the best that the other Buford herds had held a westward course and thus avoided the crush on the main routes. The only intimation which escaped him was when we had remounted and each started our way, he called me back and said, "Tom, no doubt but you've noticed that I'm worried. Well, I am. I'd tell you in a minute, but I may be wrong in the matter. But I'll know before you reach Dodge, and then, if it's necessary, you shall know all. It's nothing about the handling of the herds, for my foremen have always considered my interests first. Keep this to yourself, for it may prove a nightmare. But if it should prove true, then we must stand together. Now, that's all; mum's the word until we meet. Drop me a line if you get a chance, and don't let my troubles worry you."

While overtaking the herd, I mused over my employer's last words. But my brain was too muddy even to attempt to solve the riddle. The most plausible theory that I could advance was that

some friendly cowmen were playing a joke on him, and that the old man had taken things too seriously. Within a week the matter was entirely forgotten, crowded out of mind by the demands of the hour. The next night, on the Clear Fork of the Brazos, a stranger, attracted by our camp-fire, rode up to the wagon. Returning from the herd shortly after his arrival, I recognized in our guest John Blocker, a prominent drover. He informed us that he and his associates had fifty-two thousand cattle on the trail, and that he was just returning from overtaking two of their five lead herds. Knowing that he was a well-posted cowman on routes and sustenance, having grown up on the trail, I gave him the best our camp afforded, and in return I received valuable information in regard to the country between our present location and Doan's Crossing. He reported the country for a hundred miles south of Red River as having had a dry, backward spring, scanty of grass, and with long dry drives; and further, that in many instances water for the herds would have to be bought from those in control.

The outlook was not to my liking. The next morning when I inquired of our guest what he would advise me to do, his answer clearly covered the ground. "Well, I'm not advising any one," said he, "but you can draw your own conclusions. The two herds of mine, which I overtook, have orders to turn northeast and cross into the Nations at Red River Station. My other cattle, still below, will all be routed by way of Fort Griffin. Once across Red River, you will have the Chisholm Trail, running

through civilized tribes, and free from all annoyance of blanket Indians. South of the river the grass is bound to be better than on the western route, and if we have to buy water, we'll have the advantage of competition."

With this summary of the situation, a decision was easily reached. The Chisholm Trail was good enough for me. Following up the north side of the Clear Fork, we passed about twenty miles to the west of Fort Griffin. Constantly bearing east by north, a few days later we crossed the main Brazos at a low stage of water. But from there to Red River was a trial not to be repeated. Wire fences halted us at every turn. Owners of pastures refused permission to pass through. Lanes ran in the wrong direction, and open country for pasturage was scarce. What we dreaded most, lack of drink for the herd, was the least of our troubles, necessity requiring its purchase only three or four times. And like a climax to a week of sore trials, when we were in sight of Red River a sand and dust storm struck us, blinding both men and herd for hours. The beeves fared best, for with lowered heads they turned their backs to the howling gale, while the horsemen caught it on every side. The cattle drifted at will in an uncontrollable mass. The air was so filled with sifting sand and eddying dust that it was impossible to see a mounted man at a distance of fifty yards. The wind blew a hurricane, making it impossible to dismount in the face of it. Our horses trembled with fear, unsteady on their feet. The very sky overhead darkened as if night was falling. Two thirds of the men threw themselves in the lead of the beeves,

firing six-shooters to check them, which could not even be heard by the ones on the flank and in the rear. Once the herd drifted against a wire fence, leveled it down and moved on, sullen but irresistible. Towards evening the storm abated, and half the outfit was sent out in search of the wagon, which was finally found about dark some four miles distant.

That night Owen Ubery, as he bathed his bloodshot eyes in a pail of water, said to the rest of us: "Fellows, if ever I have a boy, and tell him how his pa suffered this afternoon, and he don't cry, I'll cut a switch and whip him until he does."

CHAPTER V. RED RIVER STATION

When the spirit of a man is once broken, he becomes useless. On the trail it is necessary to have some diversion from hard work, long hours, and exposure to the elements. With man and beast, from the Brazos to Red River was a fire test of physical endurance. But after crossing into the Chickasaw Nation, a comparatively new country would open before us. When the strain of the past week was sorest, in buoying up the spirits of my outfit, I had promised them rest and recreation at the first possible opportunity.

Fortunately we had an easy ford. There was not even an indication that there had been a freshet on the river that spring. This was tempering the wind, for we were crippled, three of the boys being unable to resume their places around the herd on account of inflamed eyes. The cook had weathered the sand-storm better than any of us. Sheltering his team, and fastening his wagon-sheet securely, he took refuge under it until the gale had passed. Pressing him into the service the next morning, and assigning him to the drag end of the herd, I left the blind to lead the blind in driving the wagon. On reaching the river about the middle of the forenoon, we trailed the cattle across in a long chain, not an animal being compelled to swim. The wagon was carried over on a ferryboat, as it was heavily loaded, a six weeks' supply of provisions having been taken on before crossing. Once

the trail left the breaks, on the north side of the river, we drew off several miles to the left and went into camp for the remainder of the day. Still keeping clear of the trail, daily we moved forward the wagon from three to five miles, allowing the cattle to graze and rest to contentment. The herd recuperated rapidly, and by the evening of the fourth day after crossing, the inflammation was so reduced in those whose eyes were inflamed, that we decided to start in earnest the next morning.

The cook was ordered to set out the best the wagon afforded, several outside delicacies were added, and a feast was in sight. G—G Cederdall had recrossed the river that day to mail a letter, and on his return proudly carried a basket of eggs on his arm. Three of the others had joined a fishing party from the Texas side, and had come in earlier in the day with a fine string of fish. Parent won new laurels in the supper to which he invited us about sundown. The cattle came in to their beds groaning and satiated, and dropped down as if ordered. When the first watch had taken them, there was nothing to do but sit around and tell stories. Since crossing Red River, we had slept almost night and day, but in that balmy May evening sleep was banished. The fact that we were in the Indian country, civilized though the Indians were, called forth many an incident. The raids of the Comanches into the Panhandle country during the buffalo days was a favorite topic. Vick Wolf, however, had had an Indian experience in the North with which he regaled us at the first opportunity.

"There isn't any trouble nowadays," said he, lighting a

cigarette, "with these blanket Indians on the reservations. I had an experience once on a reservation where the Indians could have got me easy enough if they had been on the war-path. It was the first winter I ever spent on a Northern range, having gone up to the Cherokee Strip to avoid—well, no matter. I got a job in the Strip, not riding, but as a kind of an all-round rustler. This was long before the country was fenced, and they rode lines to keep the cattle on their ranges. One evening about nightfall in December, the worst kind of a blizzard struck us that the country had ever seen. The next day it was just as bad, and BLOODY cold. A fellow could not see any distance, and to venture away from the dugout meant to get lost. The third day she broke and the sun came out clear in the early evening. The next day we managed to gather the saddle horses, as they had not drifted like the cattle.

"Well, we were three days overtaking the lead of that cattle drift, and then found them in the heart of the Cheyenne country, at least on that reservation. They had drifted a good hundred miles before the storm broke. Every outfit in the Strip had gone south after their cattle. Instead of drifting them back together, the different ranches rustled for their own. Some of the foremen paid the Indians so much per head to gather for them, but ours didn't. The braves weren't very much struck on us on that account. I was cooking for the outfit, which suited me in winter weather. We had a permanent camp on a small well-wooded creek, from which we worked all the country round.

"One afternoon when I was in camp all alone, I noticed an Indian approaching me from out of the timber. There was a Winchester standing against the wagon wheel, but as the bucks were making no trouble, I gave the matter no attention. Mr. Injun came up to the fire and professed to be very friendly, shook hands, and spoke quite a number of words in English. After he got good and warm, he looked all over the wagon, and noticing that I had no sixshooter on, he picked up the carbine and walked out about a hundred yards to a little knoll, threw his arms in the air, and made signs.

"Instantly, out of the cover of some timber on the creek a quarter above, came about twenty young bucks, mounted, and yelling like demons. When they came up, they began circling around the fire and wagon. I was sitting on an empty corn-crate by the fire. One young buck, seeing that I was not scaring to suit him, unslung a carbine as he rode, and shot into the fire before me. The bullet threw fire and ashes all over me, and I jumped about ten feet, which suited them better. They circled around for several minutes, every one uncovering a carbine, and they must have fired a hundred and fifty shots into the fire. In fact they almost shot it out, scattering the fire around so that it came near burning up the bedding of our outfit. I was scared thoroughly by this time. If it was possible for me to have had fits, I'd have had one sure. The air seemed full of coals of fire and ashes. I got good practical insight into what hell's like. I was rustling the rolls of bedding out of the circle of fire, expecting every moment would

be my last. It's a wonder I wasn't killed. Were they throwing lead? Well, I should remark! You see the ground was not frozen around the fire, and the bullets buried themselves in the soft soil.

"After they had had as much fun as they wanted, the leader gave a yell and they all circled the other way once, and struck back into the timber. Some of them had brought up the decoy Indian's horse when they made the dash at first, and he suddenly turned as wild as a Cheyenne generally gets. When the others were several hundred yards away, he turned his horse, rode back some little distance, and attracted my attention by holding out the Winchester. From his horse he laid it carefully down on the ground, whirled his pony, and rode like a scared wolf after the others. I could hear their yells for miles, as they made for their encampment over on the North Fork. As soon as I got the fire under control, I went out and got the carbine. It was empty; the Indian had used its magazine in the general hilarity. That may be an Indian's style of fun, but I failed to see where there was any in it for me."

The cook threw a handful of oily fish-bones on the fire, causing it to flame up for a brief moment. With the exception of Wayne Outcault, who was lying prone on the ground, the men were smoking and sitting Indian fashion around the fire. After rolling awhile uneasily, Outcault sat up and remarked, "I feel about half sick. Eat too much? Don't you think it. Why, I only ate seven or eight of those fish, and that oughtn't to hurt a baby. There was only half a dozen hard-boiled eggs to the man, and

I don't remember of any of you being so generous as to share yours with me. Those few plates of prunes that I ate for dessert wouldn't hurt nobody—they're medicine to some folks. Unroll our bed, pardner, and I'll thrash around on it awhile."

Several trail stories of more or less interest were told, when Runt Pickett, in order to avoid the smoke, came over and sat down between Burl Van Vedder and me. He had had an experience, and instantly opened on us at short range. "Speaking of stampedes," said Runt, "reminds me of a run I was in, and over which I was paid by my employer a very high compliment. My first trip over the trail, as far north as Dodge, was in '78. The herd sold next day after reaching there, and as I had an old uncle and aunt living in middle Kansas, I concluded to run down and pay them a short visit. So I threw away all my trail togs—well, they were worn out, anyway—and bought me a new outfit complete. Yes, I even bought button shoes. After visiting a couple of weeks with my folks, I drifted back to Dodge in the hope of getting in with some herd bound farther north—I was perfectly useless on a farm. On my return to Dodge, the only thing about me that indicated a cow-hand was my Texas saddle and outfit, but in toggery, in my visiting harness, I looked like a rank tenderfoot.

"Well, boys, the first day I struck town I met a through man looking for hands. His herd had just come in over the Chisholm Trail, crossing to the western somewhere above. He was disgusted with his outfit, and was discharging men right and left and hiring new ones to take their places. I apologized for my

appearance, showed him my outfit, and got a job cow-punching with this through man. He expected to hold on sale a week or two, when if unsold he would drift north to the Platte. The first week that I worked, a wet stormy night struck us, and before ten o'clock we lost every hoof of cattle. I was riding wild after little squads of cattle here and there, guided by flashes of lightning, when the storm finally broke. Well, there it was midnight, and I didn't have a HOOF OF CATTLE to hold and no one to help me if I had. The truth is, I was lost. Common horse-sense told me that; but where the outfit or wagon was was anybody's guess. The horses in my mount were as good as worthless; worn out, and if you gave one free rein he lacked the energy to carry you back to camp. I ploughed around in the darkness for over an hour, but finally came to a sudden stop on the banks of the muddy Arkansaw. Right there I held a council of war with myself, the decision of which was that it was at least five miles to the wagon.

"After I'd prowled around some little time, a bright flash of lightning revealed to me an old deserted cabin a few rods below. To this shelter I turned without even a bid, unsaddled my horse and picketed him, and turned into the cabin for the night. Early the next morning I was out and saddled my horse, and the question was, Which way is camp? As soon as the sun rose clearly, I got my bearings. By my reasoning, if the river yesterday was south of camp, this morning the wagon must be north of the river, so I headed in that direction. Somehow or other I stopped my horse on the first little knoll, and looking back

towards the bottom, I saw in a horseshoe which the river made a large bunch of cattle. Of course I knew that all herds near about were through cattle and under herd, and the absence of any men in sight aroused my curiosity. I concluded to investigate it, and riding back found over five hundred head of the cattle we had lost the night before. 'Here's a chance to make a record with my new boss,' I said to myself, and circling in behind, began drifting them out of the bottoms towards the uplands. By ten o'clock I had got them to the first divide, when who should ride up but the owner, the old cowman himself—the sure enough big auger.

"'Well, son,' said my boss, 'you held some of them, didn't you?' 'Yes,' I replied, surly as I could, giving him a mean look, 'I've nearly ridden this horse to death, holding this bunch all night. If I had only had a good man or two with me, we could have caught twice as many. What kind of an outfit are you working, anyhow, Captain?' And at dinner that day, the boss pointed me out to the others and said, 'That little fellow standing over there with the button shoes on is the only man in my outfit that is worth a —.'"

The cook had finished his work, and now joined the circle. Parent began regaling us with personal experiences, in which it was evident that he would prove the hero. Fortunately, however, we were spared listening to his self-laudation. Dorg Seay and Tim Stanley, bunkies, engaged in a friendly scuffle, each trying to make the other get a firebrand for his pipe. In the tussle which followed, we were all compelled to give way or get trampled underfoot. When both had exhausted themselves in vain, we

resumed our places around the fire. Parent, who was disgusted over the interruption, on resuming his seat refused to continue his story at the request of the offenders, replying, "The more I see of you two varmints the more you remind me of mule colts."

Once the cook refused to pick up the broken thread of his story, John Levering, our horse-wrangler, preempted the vacated post. "I was over in Louisiana a few winters ago with a horse herd," said John, "and had a few experiences. Of all the simple people that I ever met, the 'Cajin' takes the bakery. You'll meet darkies over there that can't speak a word of anything but French. It's nothing to see a cow and mule harnessed together to a cart. One day on the road, I met a man, old enough to be my father, and inquired of him how far it was to the parish centre, a large town. He didn't know, except it was a long, long ways. He had never been there, but his older brother, once when he was a young man, had been there as a witness at court. The brother was dead now, but if he was living and present, it was quite possible that he would remember the distance. The best information was that it was a very long ways off. I rode it in the mud in less than two hours; just about ten miles.

"But that wasn't a circumstance to other experiences. We had driven about three hundred horses and mules, and after disposing of over two thirds of them, my employer was compelled to return home, leaving me to dispose of the remainder. I was a fair salesman, and rather than carry the remnant of the herd with me, made headquarters with a man who owned a large cane-brake

pasture. It was a convenient stopping-place, and the stock did well on the young cane. Every week I would drive to some distant town eighteen or twenty head, or as many as I could handle alone. Sometimes I would sell out in a few days, and then again it would take me longer. But when possible I always made it a rule to get back to my headquarters to spend Sunday. The owner of the cane-brake and his wife were a simple couple, and just a shade or two above the Arcadians. But they had a daughter who could pass muster, and she took quite a shine to the 'Texas-Hoss-Man,' as they called me. I reckon you understand now why I made that headquarters?—there were other reasons besides the good pasturage.

"Well, the girl and her mother both could read, but I have some doubt about the old man on that score. They took no papers, and the nearest approach to a book in the house was an almanac three years old. The women folks were ravenous for something to read, and each time on my return after selling out, I'd bring them a whole bundle of illustrated papers and magazines. About my fourth return after more horses,—I was mighty near one of the family by that time,—when we were all seated around the fire one night, the women poring over the papers and admiring the pictures, the old man inquired what the news was over in the parish where I had recently been. The only thing that I could remember was the suicide of a prominent man. After explaining the circumstances, I went on to say that some little bitterness arose over his burial. Owing to his prominence it was thought

permission would be given to bury him in the churchyard. But it seems there was some superstition about permitting a self-murderer to be buried in the same field as decent folks. It was none of my funeral, and I didn't pay overmuch attention to the matter, but the authorities refused, and they buried him just outside the grounds, in the woods.

"My host and I discussed the matter at some length. He contended that if the man was not of sound mind, he should have been given his little six feet of earth among the others. A horse salesman has to be a good second-rate talker, and being anxious to show off before the girl, I differed with her father. The argument grew spirited yet friendly, and I appealed to the women in supporting my view. My hostess was absorbed at the time in reading a sensational account of a woman shooting her betrayer. The illustrations covered a whole page, and the girl was simply burning, at short range, the shirt from off her seducer. The old lady was bogged to the saddle skirts in the story, when I interrupted her and inquired, 'Mother, what do you think ought to be done with a man who commits suicide?' She lowered the paper just for an instant, and looking over her spectacles at me replied, 'Well, I think any man who would do THAT ought to be made to support the child.'"

No comment was offered. Our wrangler arose and strolled away from the fire under the pretense of repicketing his horse. It was nearly time for the guards to change, and giving the last watch orders to point the herd, as they left the bed-ground in the

morning, back on an angle towards the trail, I prepared to turn in. While I was pulling off my boots in the act of retiring, Clay Zilligan rode in from the herd to call the relief. The second guard were bridling their horses, and as Zilligan dismounted, he said to the circle of listeners, "Didn't I tell you fellows that there was another herd just ahead of us? I don't care if they didn't pass up the trail since we've been laying over, they are there just the same. Of course you can't see their camp-fire from here, but it's in plain view from the bed-ground, and not over four or five miles away. If I remember rightly, there's a local trail comes in from the south of the Wichita River, and joins the Chisholm just ahead. And what's more, that herd was there at nine o'clock this morning, and they haven't moved a peg since. Well, there's two lads out there waiting to be relieved, and you second guard know where the cattle are bedded."

CHAPTER VI. CAMP SUPPLY

In gala spirits we broke camp the next morning. The herd had left the bed-ground at dawn, and as the outfit rode away to relieve the last guard, every mother's son was singing. The cattle were a refreshing sight as they grazed forward, their ragged front covering half a mile in width. The rest of the past few days had been a boon to the few tender-footed ones. The lay-over had rejuvenated both man and beast. From maps in our possession we knew we were somewhere near the western border of the Chickasaw Nation, while on our left was the reservation of three blanket tribes of Indians. But as far as signs of occupancy were concerned, the country was unmarked by any evidence of civilization. The Chisholm Cattle Trail, which ran from Red River to the Kansas line, had almost fallen into disuse, owing to encroachments of settlements south of the former and westward on the latter. With the advancement of immigration, Abilene and Ellsworth as trail terminals yielded to the tide, and the leading cattle trace of the '70's was relegated to local use in '84.

The first guard was on the qui vive for the outfit whose camp-fire they had sighted the night before. I was riding with Clay Zilligan on the left point, when he sighted what we supposed was a small bunch of cattle lying down several miles distant. When we reached the first rise of ground, a band of saddle horses came in view, and while we were trying to locate their

camp, Jack Splann from the opposite point attracted our attention and pointed straight ahead. There a large band of cattle under herd greeted our view, compelling us to veer to the right and intersect the trail sooner than we intended. Keeping a clear half-mile between us, we passed them within an hour and exchanged the compliments of the trail. They proved to be "Laurel Leaf" and "Running W" cattle, the very ones for which the International Railway agent at the meeting in February had so boastfully shown my employer the application for cars. The foreman was cursing like a stranded pirate over the predicament in which he found himself. He had left Santo Gertrudo Ranch over a month before with a herd of three thousand straight two-year-old steers. But in the shipment of some thirty-three thousand cattle from the two ranches to Wichita Falls, six trains had been wrecked, two of which were his own. Instead of being hundreds of miles ahead in the lead of the year's drive, as he expected, he now found himself in charge of a camp of cripples. What few trains belonging to his herd had escaped the ditch were used in filling up other unfortunate ones, the injured cattle from the other wrecks forming his present holdings.

"Our people were anxious to get their cattle on to the market early this year," said he, "and put their foot into it up to the knee. Shipping to Red River was an experiment with them, and I hope they've got their belly full. We've got dead and dying cattle in every pasture from the falls to the river, while these in sight aren't able to keep out of the stench of those that croaked between here

and the ford. Oh, this shipping is a fine thing—for the railroads. Here I've got to rot all summer with these cattle, just because two of my trains went into the ditch while no other foreman had over one wrecked. And mind you, they paid the freight in advance, and now King and Kennedy have brought suit for damages amounting to double the shipping expense. They'll get it all right—in pork. I'd rather have a claim against a nigger than a railroad company. Look at your beeves, slick as weasels, and from the Nueces River. Have to hold them in, I reckon, to keep from making twenty miles a day. And here I am—Oh, hell, I'd rather be on a rock-pile with a ball and chain to my foot! Do you see those objects across yonder about two miles—in that old grass? That's where we bedded night before last and forty odd died. We only lost twenty-two last night. Oh, we're getting in shape fast. If you think you can hold your breakfast down, just take a ride through mine. No, excuse me—I've seen them too often already."

Several of the boys and myself rode into the herd some little distance, but the sight was enough to turn a copper-lined stomach. Scarcely an animal had escaped without more or less injury. Fully one half were minus one or both horns, leaving instead bloody stumps. Broken bones and open sores greeted us on every hand; myriads of flies added to the misery of the cattle, while in many instances there was evidence of maggots at work on the living animal. Turning from the herd in disgust, we went back to our own, thankful that the rate offered us had been prohibitory. The trials and vexations of the road were mere

nothings to be endured, compared to the sights we were then leaving. Even what we first supposed were cattle lying down, were only bed-grounds, the occupants having been humanely relieved by unwaking sleep. Powerless to render any assistance, we trailed away, glad to blot from our sight and memory such scenes of misery and death.

Until reaching the Washita River, we passed through a delightful country. There were numerous local trails coming into the main one, all of which showed recent use. Abandoned camp-fires and bed-grounds were to be seen on every hand, silent witnesses of an exodus which was to mark the maximum year in the history of the cattle movement from Texas. Several times we saw some evidence of settlement by the natives, but as to the freedom of the country, we were monarchs of all we surveyed. On arriving at the Washita, we encountered a number of herds, laboring under the impression that they were water-bound. Immediate entrance at the ford was held by a large herd of young cattle in charge of a negro outfit. Their stock were scattered over several thousand acres, and when I asked for the boss, a middle-aged darky of herculean figure was pointed out as in charge. To my inquiry why he was holding the ford, his answer was that until to-day the river had been swimming, and now he was waiting for the banks to dry. Ridiculing his flimsy excuse, I kindly yet firmly asked him either to cross or vacate the ford by three o'clock that afternoon. Receiving no definite reply, I returned to our herd, which was some five miles in the rear.

Beyond the river's steep, slippery banks and cold water, there was nothing to check a herd.

After the noonday halt, the wrangler and myself took our remuda and went on ahead to the river. Crossing and recrossing our saddle stock a number of times, we trampled the banks down to a firm footing. While we were doing this work, the negro foreman and a number of his men rode up and sullenly watched us. Leaving our horses on the north bank, Levering and I returned, and ignoring the presence of the darky spectators, started back to meet the herd, which was just then looming up in sight. But before we had ridden any distance, the dusky foreman overtook us and politely said, "Look-ee here, Cap'n; ain't you-all afraid of losin' some of your cattle among ours?" Never halting, I replied, "Not a particle; if we lose any, you eat them, and we'll do the same if our herd absorbs any of yours. But it strikes me that you had better have those lazy niggers throw your cattle to one side," I called back, as he halted his horse. We did not look backward until we reached the herd; then as we turned, one on each side to support the points, it was evident that a clear field would await us on reaching the river. Every horseman in the black outfit was pushing cattle with might and main, to give us a clean cloth at the crossing.

The herd forded the Washita without incident. I remained on the south bank while the cattle were crossing, and when they were about half over some half-dozen of the darkies rode up and stopped apart, conversing among themselves. When the drag

cattle passed safely out on the farther bank, I turned to the dusky group, only to find their foreman absent. Making a few inquiries as to the ownership of their herd, its destination, and other matters of interest, I asked the group to express my thanks to their foreman for moving his cattle aside. Our commissary crossed shortly afterward, and the Washita was in our rear. But that night, as some of my outfit returned from the river, where they had been fishing, they reported the negro outfit as having crossed and encamped several miles in our rear.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.